

**Opening Statement of
Chairman Henry J. Hyde
Before the Full Committee Hearing
“U.S.-ROK Relations: An Alliance at Risk?”
Wednesday, September 27, 2006
2172 RHOB**

Let me offer a warm welcome to our expert witnesses today and sincere congratulations to the people of South Korea as they prepare to celebrate next month's National Foundation Day and their Chusok Thanksgiving Day holidays.

There are few alliances that have stood the test of time through such a series of major transitions as that of the United States and the Republic of Korea. Born of the blood ties of shared conflict, matured in the tense period of the Cold War, having transited through the birth of democracy in South Korea, further forged in Vietnam and Iraq, the alliance now faces new challenges. Seoul's concerns for its downtrodden brethren in the North and for maintaining the peace on the Korean peninsula must be balanced with Washington's heartfelt concerns over Pyongyang's egregious human rights abuses and, in a post-September 11th environment, over proliferation of weapons of mass destruction by a dictatorial state.

I am, by nature, an optimist. My recent visit to Seoul, in addition to a meeting this month with the South Korean President in Washington, lead me to believe that the differences we face are just bumps in the road on the path to a more mature, equitable alliance.

The Congress can certainly take concrete steps to enhance this alliance. These would include ratification of a Free Trade Agreement with Seoul, once it is negotiated, which promotes both free and fair trade. In addition, Members can urge the Departments of Homeland Security and State to include South Korea in the Visa Waiver Program as soon as it meets all the legal requirements.

While accentuating the positive, we must remember that significant challenges exist in the alliance and they cannot be papered over. A recent article published by the Council on Foreign Relations entitled, "The Fragile U.S.-South Korea Alliance," underscores this.

Some of the issues to be addressed today involve basic nuts-and-bolts matters. The resolution of these, however, will be key to the resiliency of this alliance. The first involves the relocation of United States Forces Korea (USFK) out of Seoul and a reduction of America's highly visible footprint in South Korea. I received a very encouraging letter in this regard from the Governor of GyeongGi Province, which will play host to the new USFK headquarters. The Governor pledged his full cooperation and support in this endeavor. Observers of the alliance, however, are fully aware that the target relocation date of the end of 2007 cannot be realistically met and that there are burden-sharing issues that have not yet been adequately addressed.

A second issue involves the provision of a training range for our Air Force pilots stationed in Korea. They have had to travel as far away as Thailand for training due to the lack of provision of an adequate range in South Korea. I am happy to report that President Roh assured our Congressional

Delegation last month that this problem would be satisfactorily addressed. Recent South Korean news reports indicate that the training issue is now resolved. I hope our witnesses can confirm this.

A third issue involves operational control of South Korean forces in wartime. As I stated during my visit to Seoul: "I have concluded that enough time has passed for Seoul to be up-to-speed in terms of providing for its own defense. I support a transfer of wartime operational control of the forces of the Republic of Korea to their own command at the earliest possible moment...The American people welcome Seoul's expressed desire to take charge of its own defense in wartime." President Harry Truman certainly never suspected that, over half a century after the Incheon landing, Americans would still be playing the leading role in the defense of South Korea. After more than a half century of preparation under an American command, the South Korean military is ready to leave the nest and fly high into the heavens.

And as I mention Incheon, where I laid a wreath this summer, I note that the September 15th anniversary of that heroic landing has just passed. Let us pause for a moment to recall those who fell to preserve South Korean sovereignty.

A fourth alliance issue involves the environmental cleanup of bases previously occupied by American forces. This issue has been underscored in the South Korean public's mind by Seoul filmmakers. They produced a film called "The Host" which was this summer's South Korean blockbuster, drawing over thirteen million viewers from a population of fifty-million. In a loose takeoff of the traditional monster movie, "Creature from the Black Lagoon," the plot involves a hideous monster who emerges from the Han River to run amok in Seoul devouring women and children. But, this time, the creature is painted with the Stars and Stripes. The source of its incarnation is given as pollutants poured into the river by the United States military. Artistic freedom is a wonderful thing. In promoting our alliances in the Second World War, however, Hollywood filmmakers understood it was vital to present our Allies, Great Britain and Free China, as the good guys, and the German Nazis and the Imperial Japanese army as the bad guys. This very basic premise seems to have been lost by those in Seoul who seek a quick profit by stirring up latent anti-American feelings.

And I have now come to the heart of the matter. An alliance must be based on two peoples' shared interests of course. More importantly, however, the two peoples must share good feelings toward each other. Without that, an alliance is just an empty piece of paper.

As I noted last month when I visited General MacArthur's statue in Incheon: "I am well aware that there are those in South Korea today who take a different view of this battle site and of this monument...I ask the people of South Korea...to recall what the statue of General MacArthur symbolizes. The statue stands for more than just one man, great a man though he was. It stands for fidelity. In times of war and in times of peace, the American people have stood with you -- in times of tension and in times of calm -- in times of want and in times of plenty." Fidelity is the key to an enduring alliance.

I now turn to my good friend Tom Lantos for his opening remarks.